

# SPEECH

OF THE

REV. WILLIAM ELDER, A. M.,

AT THE MEETING OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK AUXILIARY TO THE BRITISH  
AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY, HELD IN ST. JOHN ON THE 11th DAY OF  
JANUARY, 1853.

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The Rev. WILLIAM ELDER, in seconding the second resolution,  
spoke as follows :—

SIR,—Before speaking to the Resolution which I have the honour to second, I cannot but express the satisfaction which I feel on casting my eyes around this influential and crowded assembly. This meeting must be held as pledged to the principles involved in the Constitution of the British and Foreign Bible Society ; and these principles rebuke some of the leading errors of the age, and assert some of the dearest rights of men. It is a principle involved in the Constitution of this Society that the Bible contains in itself a perfect rule of faith ; a rule to which nothing may be added, and from which nothing should be taken away : and this meeting protests against any such perilous addition, or ruinous subtraction. It is a principle involved in the constitution of this Society, that this rule of faith is inspired, and authoritative ; and this meeting is a protest against rationalism, and infidelity, in whatever forms they may appear. It is, I trust, a pledge that the Evangelical Christianity of the City of St. John will neither directly, nor indirectly, countenance, encourage, or support those, who, either through the press, or on the platform, in the lecture-room, or in the pulpit, speak slightly of the volume which we love, or of institutions which we venerate. It is a principle involved in the Constitution of this Society, that it is the right of every human being to possess, and to read the word of God, without human note or comment ; and that with this right arising as it does out of the relation of the creature to the Creator, no law of man should dare to intermeddle. Were it necessary to say a single word in defence of a principle so self-evident, this defence might readily be found in the very nature of law. The sphere of human law, strictly speaking, is merely declarative, and the declarations which it

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deems it expedient to make—or if it pleases better so to call them,—its enactments, and the means by which it seeks to give effect to them, ought ever to be in the strictest harmony with the relations of things. These relations are to be sought in the book of Nature, and the teachings of inspiration. If any human law contravenes any of these inexorable relations, it is at best worthless ; and at worst, injurious, or cruel, or impious, as the case may be,—or all three united. Such a law may be harmless as the papal bull against the motion of the earth, of which Pascal said, “ it is all in vain ;” or it may be cruel as the “ tender mercies” of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, or the dark dungeons of the King of Naples. It may be so impious as, by prohibiting men from reading the word of God, to interdict the King of kings, from speaking to his own subjects : and to this impiety, insulting the common sense of mankind, it may add the enormous absurdity of alleging in its justification a warrant from God himself ! Now, Sir, the law, or usage or custom, or by whatsoever name, or names it is called, which prohibits the reading of God’s word, ignores and contravenes the relation between God and man—it implicitly, if not explicitly, interdicts their intercourse ; and against this law, interdict or prohibition, in the face of the Duke of Tuscany, in the face of the King of Naples, in the face of all the civil and ecclesiastical despotisms of the continent of Europe, this meeting protests in the name of mankind, in the face of the world, and in the presence of God. Looking then, Sir, to the importance of those principles, I cannot but congratulate this meeting on their assertion ; and I cannot more appropriately congratulate it than in the words of the motto of your own City :—

*O fortunati ! quorum jam moenia surgunt.*

The year of the Parent Society’s operations referred to in the resolution, has been one of singular interest to the Christian philanthropist. The Industrial Exhibition of 1851, with which the Society’s year commenced, must be regarded as one of the most important events which mark the opening of the second half of the 19th century. Then for the first time from the period of their separation on the Plains of Shinar, greatly more than three thousand years before, the nations of the earth met together in love and friendship. They met in a little island utterly unknown to the old aristocratic nations of the East ; one of a group, which the Greeks and Romans called by no honourable name. They met on the happy soil of that land which its children fondly call “ Old England.” They met, welcomed by the smiles of the good Queen Victoria, and aided by the active co-operation of the Prince-Consort. They met, and beneath the ample roof of the Crystal Palace, they mingled their voices together in thanksgiving to Him who of “ one blood” had made them all ; and whose widely-opened hand had liberally supplied all their wants. Thus, the genius of Industry having assembled the nations, Christianity cheerfully

recognised, and blest their meeting. The occasion was eminently favourable to the objects contemplated by the British and Foreign Bible Society, and I can testify to the fact that it did not allow it to pass unimproved. It exhibited the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, or portions of them, in 130 languages; and need I say, that if this Society sought no prize, it met no competitor? One reward it did indeed seek, and obtain. It experienced the luxury of doing good. Through these various languages, as through so many pipes or channels, it sought to convey the waters of life to the parched lips of the perishing millions. It offered to every man an opportunity of hearing in his own tongue, wherein he was born, the wonderful works of God. The intellect of man had often asked, but never rightly answered that tremendous question in which we are all more deeply interested than in any other: It had asked—"How shall a man be just before God?" and to this question—of the answer to which science said, it is not in me, and philosophy said, it is not in me—the Society, through the Book which it circulated, undertook to supply an infallible solution. The good effected by means of the copies of the sacred scriptures issued by the Society on that occasion—or the good to be yet effected by their instrumentality, and the accompanying influences of the Spirit of God, it is not easy to estimate, and it would perhaps be difficult to overrate. When it is remembered that many of the copies of the Scriptures then either sold, or gratuitously distributed, were carried away to cities on the Continent of Europe, in which, while professed ministers of religion are very numerous, and lives of the Saints are every where to be had, and missals and prayer-books abound, not a single copy of that word which alone can make wise unto salvation can be purchased, or obtained: and when it is remembered that the version of the Old Testament made by Wycliffe—and by means of which those seeds of Divine truth were sown which afterwards produced the British Reformation—*has never yet been printed*, it may not unwarrantably be hoped that under the more favorable circumstances under which those distributions were made, and accompanied as they were by the prayers of many of God's people, we may again soon hear of a like honour being put upon the Divine Word. Thus, Sir, the past year of the Society's operations opened well: but its end was better than its beginning. It may be remembered that not many years ago the possibility of opening up China to the influence of the Gospel, or to any foreign influence whatever, was frequently discussed. It was referred to in the pulpit. It was brought forward at missionary associations. It was handled by men of widely different opinions, political and religious. It engaged the lively pen of Sydney Smith. It exercised the mind of Isaac Taylor. By most persons it was conjectured that the aperient influence must come from within—by a few that it might come from without. But even if it did come, what, it was inquired, could be done for a people who had no mind in which



ideas might float ; no medium of communication which could take up a single atom of knowledge or of sentiment of foreign growth. " Were it not as well," asks the last mentioned writer, " to attempt to inform and persuade the sculptures of Elephanta, or the glazed images of their own pottery ?" And, in answer to his own question, he could do no more than fall back on scripture statement, without being at all clear as to the *manner* in which the promised consummation might be realized. The last few months of the Society's year brought with them a solution of this difficult problem. During that period, forgetting their celestial origin, and their absurd chronology, and the intolerable vulgarity of other ordinary mortals, no less than ten thousand Chinese actually crossed the Pacific, and positively landed on barbarian shores. The event was not due to the enlightened policy of " a native prince." It arose neither from " popular commotion nor revolutions of dynasty." It did not justify the prophetic wisdom of the Edinburgh Reviewer, nor afford additional evidence of the penetration of the author of the " Natural History of Enthusiasm." The event, destined as we believe in the counsel of Him—

—Who works in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform,

to rend the swaddling bands in which China had been wrapped for millennial ages ; to develop into manhood the prolonged childhood of the churlish Empire of Japan ; to bring about in due time the freedom of the unhappy republics of South America ; to provide a home for those teeming populations, for which Malthus and his followers could suggest no suitable provision ; to found a centre of Commerce, perhaps of empire, such as the world has never yet seen, was the apparently fortuitous discovery of gold in California. The maxim

" *Cælum non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt,*"

never rigidly true, was soon found to be sadly at fault in the case of the Transpacific Chinamen. With a change of climate which was inconsiderable, their minds were revolutionized. Their " petrifications of ancient usages," their fossilized ideas were speedily shattered into countless fragments ; they fell to pieces with a crash,—sudden, violent, and destructive as the fall of the Derby-D'Israeli Ministry. Witness the reply of the San Franciscan Chinese to the spirit of national exclusiveness discovered by the American governor—a reply which Vattel would have commended, and Grotius approved. It is now certain that by personal and epistolary intercourse with the parent country, aided by the new commerce to be thus produced, these newly acquired ideas in all their fresh vitality must be disseminated over the whole slumbering East ; and its myriads of millions being thus made to think, must speedily seek for a reply to the questions which thinking men must ask, and which the Bible alone can answer. It is

evident, in short, that a very large and hitherto inaccessible portion of the human race may speedily be annexed to the already extended dominions of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Happy if we shall find ourselves in a position to avail ourselves of these openings ; then will commerce, fulfilling the "chief end" of its existence, become Christianity's Prime Minister of Progress ; then will Commerce be itself more blest ; the favouring breezes bearing the good ships across the no longer treacherous deep with unwonted safety, and unusual speed—more than fulfilling the words in which a Roman Poet complimented a Christian Emperor :—

" O nimium dilecte Deo ! Cui fundit ab antris  
Æolus armatas hyemes, Cui militat æther,  
Et conjurati veniunt ad classica venti."

Let me now, Sir, leaving the foreign aspect of this Society's operations, say a word or two on the probable results of British Bible circulation. And not to enter upon ground already occupied, I shall merely in a very few sentences refer to the influence of the Bible as affecting our national existence. The enquiry has frequently been made, shall Britain fall, as fell all the great Empires of former times, and as Turkey is now falling ? and who is it that does not feel interested in the answer to this enquiry ? Who is it that is not ready to ask, shall another Scipio weep over Britain's ruined capital, another Botto or a second Layard disinter the buried city or another Gibbon, sitting on some of its broken columns or mouldering arches, meditate the story of our National Decline and Fall ? Or, if patriotism would fondly answer in the negative, on what grounds, it may be asked, is exemption claimed from the common fate of Empires ? Wherein do we differ from those already fallen ? Sir, it appears to me that we differ very much ; in this chiefly, "that unto us has been committed the oracles of God," and in this difference, if we avail ourselves of it, I see grounds on which we may hope for perpetuated empire. If one were to set out with affirming the proposition that a nation ignorant of the religion which the Bible teaches must experience premature destruction, then an analysis of the causes which led to the overthrow of the ancient monarchies would establish its truth ; or if any one will analyze these causes, without any foregone conclusion, he must reach the same result. Tried by their recognition of those relations which God has impressed upon society, the Constitutions of those Empires were utterly unconstitutional ; and hence, in obedience to a law as imperative as that which causes the bankruptcy of an insurance office, whose rates of premium have been framed in defiance of the warnings of the bills of mortality, such Empires must sooner or later have fallen. Much more must they have fallen, when besides being unacquainted with those principles of civil and religious liberty, of the knowledge of which the Bible is a primary source, they wanted also the *conservative* influence of that religion which the Bible alone teaches, and the want of which

must eventually overturn any Empire, however perfect its Constitution, Now then, Sir, applying these principles to our own case, it is clear that we possess, or may possess both these advantages. Guided by the principles which the Bible inculcates, we may avoid all those evils which make a nation weak, and enhance the power of all those influences which make a nation strong. We possess a Constitution elaborated by men whom Christianity had taught how to make a Constitution, and which has perhaps almost arrived at perfection; and in the religion which the Bible teaches, a catholic religion—a religion addressed to all that is in man, and to every relation of life—"which is the highest style of man," and must consequently produce the highest style of nations, we have the means of removing all moral and internal causes of decay. It is the sin and imperfection of man which mainly conspire to make civil government at once necessary and difficult; and Catholic Christianity by elevating and perfecting men's moral condition, and thus making the strain upon government less, must virtually give government more power without the necessity of using it; and the governed more freedom without the danger of abusing it. Possessing a Constitution recognizing those great principles of civil and religious liberty, which as yet men have never been able to work out for themselves, and have only learned from the Bible, and possessing in the great mass of its subjects men regenerated by Bible Christianity, our Empire could not fall from within—and it could not readily fall from without. No Empire imbued with like principles would attempt its overthrow; and no Empire not so imbued could succeed in such an attempt. Forces vastly superior in numbers might be led against it in vain, for unlike debates, the great decisive battles of the world have seldom been won by majorities. The very name of such an Empire would be to it a tower of strength; its smile would be universally courted; its frown universally deprecated; and its duration would be indefinitely prolonged. And this, Sir, is the destiny which I fondly hope awaits the British Empire—this is the unprecedented destiny to which it may attain—if the masses in its large cities, and if the people generally, are but brought under the influences of Bible Christianity. I know indeed, Sir, that men to whose genius and learning we are much indebted have frequently reasoned upon the progress, and retrogression of mankind, upon civilization and barbarism, without either estimating the destructive force of vice, or the conservative influence of true religion—a religion made for man, and adequate to all his wants. Thus reasons Gibbon, and thus reasons Adam Smith; and while our brilliant historian, Mr. Macaulay, informed by the events of 1848, corrects these writers for omitting to take any notice of the former, he does not himself take any notice of the latter. Hence it is to the British Constitution that he refers our safety on that critical occasion, and hence it was, that in 1848 he despaired of the prospects of man-

kind, and feared that the barbarism of the 5th might take the place of the civilization of the 19th century. If, Sir, I could for a moment admit that it was to our Constitution that we owed our safety, I could only do so by finding in it those qualities which Mr. Macaulay denies to it. In his sparkling paper on Jewish disabilities, he ridicules the idea of "the Constitution" being "essentially Christian," and affirms that to speak of an essentially Christian Government, is to use words which mean just as much as essentially Christian horsemanship." Our safety, then, is not to be referred to the fact that we possessed a Constitution, and a Government founded upon it—which Christianity could alone teach men to make—a Constitution under which in the Coronation oath—which is of the essence of every Constitution—the Sovereign with all possible solemnities binds himself to uphold Protestant Christianity; our safety is not to be referred to the fact that the great bulk of the subjects of the British Empire had felt the regenerating and conservative influence of Bible Christianity, preventing or removing the "vice and ignorance, and misery," by which Constitutions are overthrown, and barbarism produced, or prevented only at the expense of liberty. If the principles already stated be well founded, such representations must be pronounced exceedingly defective. They are defective in not accrediting the Constitution with those principles to which it is indebted for being what it is. They are also inconsistent with the causes, which as Mr. Macaulay himself admits, produce barbarism. Will "vice" cease to be vicious, and "ignorance" become metamorphosed into enlightenment, and "misery" wipe away its tears, in view of the excellence of a Constitution? Will the barbarian hordes, generated by an ungodly civilisation, unbought by gold, and unchecked by a nation which by vice has become degenerate, halt in their destructive march,—in reverent admiration of Magna Charta, or the Revolution Settlement, the Reform Bill, or the Coronation Oath? I leave the question to be answered by thinking men: I leave to them to decide whether the imagination that such unclean spirits may be thus cast out, may not hopefully compete for the palm of absurdity, with Mr. Walpole's Militia Bill,—if that Bill involved, as Mr. Macaulay asserts it did, the absurdity "of measuring a man for the franchise." It was equally unphilosophical to despair of the prospects of mankind—and the panic arose from the fact that the conservative influence of Bible Christianity was one of those things which did not enter into Mr. Macaulay's philosophy. This great force directed by one who is Governor among the nations, and the Prince of the kings of the earth must continue to operate;—it must cause vice and ignorance and misery to flee before it, and it must produce a civilisation which shall not generate barbarians. Bible Christianity must go forward, though its march should be over tottering thrones, and ruined dynasties; though it should make the revolutions of empires its chariot wheels of progress; and in



going forward it must ameliorate the condition of mankind. I conclude, then, the authority of some great names notwithstanding, that we may hopefully look to Bible circulation, as a means of national conservation ; I conclude that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, *all these things shall be added unto us*. And if so, how grand the object to which Patriotism and Piety may, and should aspire ! It is nobler than that which fired the heart of Alexander. At the tomb of Achilles, he envied the fortune of the hero whose deeds were immortalized in Mæonian song ; but to us it is given, to make a perpetuated Empire the monumental record of our works of faith, and labours of love ; an Empire whose destructive doom the recording angel shall never register ; and the story of whose Decline and Fall, the muse of History shall never trace upon the scroll of Time ; an Empire which, in a good old age, its energies unspent, and its natural force unabated, shall hear the voice of the descending Saviour recognize its work, and pronounce its reward ; and of which it shall be told in the court of Heaven :—This is that Empire that founded by the nation to which was committed the *second* keeping of the sacred oracles, in trust for mankind, saved itself by gratefully submitting to their teaching, and blessed the world by their propagation.